

4.

The Danger of Infidelity ;
OR, THE
Necessity of a living Faith in Christ.

BEING THE
SUBSTANCE
OF A
DISCOURSE
Delivered in BRISTOL.

In the YEAR 1742.

By JOHN CENNICK.

But follow after Faith. 1 Tim. vi. 11.

Without Faith it is impossible to please God. Heb.
xi. 6.

Contend earnestly for the Faith once delivered to the
Saints. Jude iii. 3.

Believe in the Lord your God, so shall ye be esta-
blished ; believe his Prophets, so shall ye prosper.
2 Chron. xx. 20.

Hold the Mystery of Faith in a pure Conscience.
1 Tim. iii. 9.

THE FIFTH EDITION.

L O N D O N :

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The British Museum

Department of Zoology

Specimens of a living fish in the

collection of the British Museum

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Sept. 11. 1816. A.

L. B. B. M.

2 COR. xiii. 5.

Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith.

IF the Holy Ghost had not known and foreseen how some would have made mistakes, through the subtle working of satan and the weakness of their own hearts, in the matter of faith, there would have been no need of this exhortation: And if I was not convinced that many even now suppose they believe who are far from it, I would not have chosen this subject; but as this is the case now in Christendom that many err concerning faith and deceive themselves, crying Peace when there is no peace, I shall speak briefly of the true scriptural doctrine of faith, and of the benefits which we receive thereby; and then pray you, in the apostle's manner, to search yourselves and examine your hearts if ye have faith, or be of that number who concerning faith are reprobate.

Now ye know how trifling a matter almost all men make of faith; and hence it is that so many foolishly ask, Why, have not we all faith in Christ? have not we been baptized, learned the catechism and the creed? and do not we all confess the Bible to be the word of God? would you have us think ourselves heathens and infidels? I thank God, (says one) I have believed from my

cradle; another has been a believer ever since he could understand, &c. &c. All this proves they know little about the matter, but would make me question if they knew at all what that precious thing means. I do not think it would be proper to say directly to all sorts of people, you do not believe, you have not faith, because our Saviour's method is best: "Believest thou on the Son of God?" And yet this way of dealing with some would make them angry, and would appear just as impertinent to many who name Jesus Christ's name, as if one should ask, have you got eyes? do you see? But however this may seem, it is a necessary question; and I wish all who hear me to-day would ask their own hearts and examine themselves, Am I in the faith? do I believe? Happy is that man who can say, with the poor man in the gospel, "Lord, I believe, help my unbelief!"

The common description and definition of faith in Christ, is the consent and assent to the truth and veracity of the scriptures; and if this was a true account, then our Saviour need not to have scrupled if he should find faith upon earth at his second coming, nor the apostles to have given such a charge concerning keeping the faith: for all who call themselves Christians are believers, and their number is many millions in the world. But bear with me and let me tell you, as a servant of Jesus Christ and as your servant for Christ's sake, such a notion is dangerous and against the mind of all the scriptures, and the Apostle of our profession in particular, who has spoken so honourably of faith and made sure all his promises to them that believe. Luther had said, 'Faith is a divine work wrought in the heart by the Holy

Holy Ghost ;' and a greater than Luther said, "Faith is the substance of things hoped for; the evidence, or, as some translate it, the witness, the persuasion and assurance of things unseen." Faith is a divine testimony and evidence in our hearts, whereby God assures us, that he who is, and was, and is to come, was once a man for our sakes, and has died for us on the cross, and took all our sin and curse upon himself, and has loved us with an everlasting love; has healed us by his stripes, has washed us in his blood, justified and sealed us to the day of redemption; and this we believe and know, this we have learned of the Father; this no man can teach his brother, nor any woman her neighbour; but this all must learn of God, as it is written in Isaiah, "All thy children shall be taught of the Lord, and great shall be the peace of thy children," Isa. liv. 13. This all men have not; but all who ask it have it, all who seek it shall find it, and none have need to perish for lack of it, but apply to him who reveals his wisdom to the babes and he shall not apply in vain; but all must have it or fall through unbelief; for "without faith it is impossible to please God;" and, "he that believeth not, shall be damned." To be short, as sure as one believes that there is such a country as America, though one has not been there; or such a mountain as Teneriff, though we have not seen it; or such a thing as the sea, though we have not been near it; so verily can a man believe the promises of God concerning Jesus Christ and his righteousness, which are given and read to us, only with this difference, that of the former things a man may be firmly persuaded, and venture all that he has in this world upon the truth of it, and yet get nothing
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by it; but no man can believe the latter, without enjoying at the same time the very blessings and substance of what he believes, because faith is the substance of things hoped for, and it is done to us in the moment we believe according to our faith: we can thenceforward say, I believe and know thou art the Christ the Saviour of the world: I believe thou hast loved me, and given thyself for me. Blessed are they that are of faith, Gal. iii. 9.

It is most certain that a believer shall be saved, as it is written, "If thou believest in thy heart on the Lord Jesus, thou shalt be saved," Rom. x. 9. Our Saviour says the same in his last words, "He that believeth, and is baptized, shall be saved," Mark xvi. 16.; and St. Paul and Silas said to the jailor at Philippi, "Believe on the Lord Jesus and thou shalt be saved," Acts xvi. 31. But who can think all who profess Christianity will be saved, or hope all who are called by his name shall escape judgment, let them live wicked as they will, when our Saviour has so plainly said that, in the last day, many shall come to him and say, Lord, Lord, we have been called by thy name, we have eat and drank in thy presence, &c. to whom he shall say, Depart from me, I never knew you, Matt. vii. 22.

Now one of these two propositions are true; either but few have faith, or such as have faith can be lost. The Holy Ghost contradicts the latter throughout all the Bible; shall we oppose him? God forbid! "Let God be true and every man a liar." No wicked man has faith. No drunkard or unclean person, no whoremonger, or adulterer, or swearer, or railer, or persecutor, or friend of this world, is a believer. He is dead

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to God while he lives, and his carnal dead consenting to the scriptures will profit him nothing. He is without faith and no true Christian. He that believes, obtained his faith from the Holy Spirit, and is taught of God; and he who knows it, and has that understanding which St. John mentions in the fifth chapter of his first epistle and at the twentieth verse, whereby we "know him that is true, and are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ, and this is eternal life." But why need we many words? hear ye the words of the Lord: "He that believeth, shall not perish, but have eternal life," John iii. 15. "Whosoever believeth on him, is born of God," 1 John v. 1. "He that believeth, hath the witness in himself," 1 John v. 10. "To them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to as many as believe on his name," John i. 12. "Whosoever believeth, shall receive remission of his sins," Acts x. 43. But the time would fail me to bring together all the proofs of this doctrine which are to be met with in the holy scriptures, for then I must bring the whole Bible; for therefore was all written, that you might believe on the name of the Son of God, and have eternal life through his name, 1 John v. 13. John xx. 31. By all these scriptures you may easily try if you have faith. Enter then into thy closet and shut the door after thee: hold an assize in thine own breast and judge thyself, that thou mayest not be judged of the Lord; examine thyself, if thou art in the faith; ask thy heart, Have I eternal life? am I born of God? are my sins remitted? am I a child of God? else what good does my dead faith do? what benefit have I by the death and blood of Jesus? or what are his sufferings and wounds to me, if I am not healed and helped thereby? Nor let such thoughts rise
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in thy heart as if none could now be thus blessed or have the same faith which once the disciples and martyrs had; for there is but one faith; and except thou hast that one faith, thou canst not be saved; nor reason sophistically, as if it was possible to have true faith, eternal life, and pardon of sins, and thou not know it, for it is antiscritural. All his people know him, from the least to the greatest. His sheep know him; and therefore says St. John, "I have written to you, that ye may know that you have eternal life;" and thus, in the text, St. Paul shews you how to find out if you have faith or not. "What! he says, know ye not that Jesus Christ is in you?" Be honest and upright; do not desire to quiet your consciences or cry to your hearts as in another sense Paul cried to the jailor, "Do thyself no harm;" but be jealous about your estate, and examine whether you are in the faith. Awake out of your slumbering condition, nor be content till you can say, I believe! I believe Jesus loved me and died for me! With this faith begins eternal life and all happiness. It is this that justifies and brings peace to the heart. It is to this the Holy Ghost bears witness that we are the children of God; and where this faith is in the heart, there the souls overcome the world, are delivered from sin, are washed and saved from the dread of death, through which all their lifetime they were subject to bondage, and set above the fear of hell and satan, as if both were abolished for ever. But where this true and living faith is not, there satan and sin reign; there the soul is in continual terror, and has a sort of constant fearful looking for judgment and fiery indignation; and well it may be so, for no creature is safe without it. The most self-righteous and seemingly holy, and even the sincere

cere man, who seeks to make himself good and just, is, after all, but almost persuaded to be a Christian. He still is uneasy and restless, because yet he lacks one thing; one thing is still needful; it is faith in the blood of Jesus Christ.

How some people can reconcile the fears of death and eternity with real and inward Christianity, or the secret doubtings and falling into desponding thoughts about their interest in Jesus with faith, that I do not understand. Can one, who believes his name is in the book of life, be afraid to die? Or can one who believes Jesus the Lamb of God has taken away his sins, shudder at the approach of eternity? O it is not likely. Does the child tremble because his school is done, that he may go home to his dear parents, whose only son he is? Or does the poor shipwrecked mariner shudder to see the day break and find himself just ashore? Or does the slave lament to be ransomed and freed, or the poor prisoner weep and grieve to have his prison-door opened and his chains knocked off, because his king has pardoned him? Ye know, my brethren, it is contrary to nature. But just as the wayfaring man rejoices to see the end of his journey, or the labourer, who has toiled hard all day, is glad to rest; so a believer rejoices when his chilling limbs forebode his departure, or his faltering eyes presage his hastening end. As he believes, so he expects to meet the Lamb his Saviour in peace, and so he shall find it and not be disappointed. Yea, the believer, when he but thinks on the happy moment when he shall depart and flee away, has his heart leap for joy, and he hastens on with expectations and longings, which cannot be uttered, for that time of grace: and whence comes this? Because he believes; because he has

that faith once delivered to the saints. He has that only dependence on God his Saviour which the former children of God had, and by which the confessors and witnesses of Christ, in all ages, so gladly yielded to all sufferings, and even to lay down their lives. But the greatest heroes in Christianity were weak and like other men, till by faith they waxed valiant in their fight, and obtained the witness that they pleased God: then life was Christ, and death was gain. Examine thyself now then, and see if thou hast faith. Dost thou believe in Jesus that he is thy Saviour? Does thy heart bound and dance in thee to answer, Yes, I believe? I believe he is my Lord, my Rock, and my strong Salvation. How would it be with thee should now the sun, that ruled this day, be darkened, and the moon and stars withdraw their shining? Suppose that now one should surprise thee by telling thee, He is coming on the clouds of heaven with all his angels, the sea and its waves are roaring and the mountains and hills removing, and heaven and earth fleeing before the Son of man, how would it sound to thee? Would thy heart be glad? Shouldest thou like to feel the earth trembling underneath, and see yonder blue sky filled with myriads of blessed spirits, and hear all the angels hailing down the God whose vesture is dipped in blood, with all their harps and trumpets sounding before him, and hear louder and louder the voice of the archangel and the trumpet of God, Arise and come to judgment! Put the case near to thee, for that day shall surely come, and thine eyes shall see the Son of the most high God descending to divide between the sheep and the goats; and dost thou believe that thou shouldest meet him with joy? Can thy soul think on it
with

with pleasure? Canst thou say, Yes, Lord Jesus, I long for thee: O come quickly! Then happy thou, and blessed be the day when thou wast born; for so surely as thou trustest in him, so surely as thou believest in Jesus, so surely shall he confess thee in that day, and thou shalt enter with him into the bride-chamber, and be ever with him.

But examine thyself: how camest thou by this faith? how was it when thou believedst? Methinks I hear thee say, O! I was once, like others, dead while I lived; I loved pleasure, was fond of the world, and contented myself with the form of godliness, till the Lord called to me as he did once to Adam, "Where art thou?" till he stopped me in the height of my sins (as he did Balaam, with his sword in his hand) and made my heart hear him say, "Why persecutest thou me?" Then did I awake, and my whole life and all my sins became a burden intolerable and more than I could bear; I was afraid I should never be saved. A sense of my guilt was ever before me, and my heart failed within me. I attempted to make vows and resolutions of amendment; and, if possible, would have made myself righteous: but, O! I said, all my righteousness was filthy rags; sin revived, and I died; I was ready to perish; I felt my heart like a stone; my hypocrisy and shame and sins became abominable in my eyes, so that I was quite miserable, and felt how well I deserved hell. I knew my infidelity; I knew I did not, I could not believe on the Son of God: I wanted faith in him, and wished to know he loved me. But then did the Holy Ghost direct me to him, shewed me my bleeding High-Priest, led me to the living fountain of his blood, and made me feel that ~~the least~~ *that* drop could wash me whiter than snow. O how did

I languish and thirst for his blood ! how did I sigh for his wounds and wish to be saved ! I believed he could save me and none beside : and now I was drawn to him ; now came the day much to be remembered, the time of grace : I called upon the Redeemer, and my constant thought was, " Have mercy upon me ! Have mercy upon me ! " I held him with an unspeakable longing for grace ; and then did he smile, and I received faith in his name ; then did he whisper, " Thy sins are forgiven. " I believe he loved me and shed his blood for me ; I believed, and felt my sins were done away and my iniquity purged ; all was new in a moment ; I had eternal life ; I was born of God, and God's Spirit bore witness with my spirit that I was a child of God. I had the witness in myself, and was sure the promises of God were true, I believed and knew that I was my Beloved's, and my Beloved was mine.

This, this is the language of a faithful soul ; this is the natural way in which an enamoured Christian expresses the manner of his believing in Jesus. He knows he was once blind ; he knows he was once in unbelief till the Comforter came, whose first work and office is to convince of sin, because they believe not in Christ ; and then, secondly, he convinces of righteousness, namely, the righteousness of the Lord our God, the righteousness of the second Adam, which righteousness is made ours by faith, and justifies all who believe in Jesus from all things from which it is impossible to be justified by the law, or works, or any thing else.

I know this doctrine sounds strange and uncouth to many ears, especially to such as have never questioned their faith or belief in our Saviour,

viour. But, as I said before, whenever men think I have always believed, it is a manifest argument they have not believed to this day. Wonder not then if such condemn this doctrine or despise it; nor be discouraged if thou art persecuted and slandered for contending for this faith. If you should get such people to confess this, and no other is the true faith of God's elect, they would seem themselves stripped of their Christianity in a moment, and could say, as once Laban did to Jacob, "Thou hast taken away my gods, and what have I got more?" It is therefore so hard to convince such that they believe not, that it needs the Holy Ghost, and none else can do it. It is against the pride of our nature to suffer one's self to be accounted an infidel or an unbeliever; and yet, like it or not, all are such who have not eternal life, forgiveness of sin, and the inward witness in their hearts, that Jesus Christ our Saviour loves them.

Whosoever then here examines himself and finds he is not in the faith, let him with tears and shame confess it before our Saviour, and resolve not to be satisfied till they have it. Cry in your hearts to him who is the Author and Finisher of faith: and though some should try to hinder you by persuading you that you need not be concerned, that you are certainly good Christians, that God does not require such things at your hands, &c. do as Bartimeus, cry so much the more a great deal, till Jesus stands still and says to you, "What wilt thou that I should do unto thee?" But above all do not let unbelief be cherished or encouraged, that is the worst sin of all. It is a mercy and a blessing when a soul can believe who Jesus is, namely, the Lord and a Saviour. Do you believe this? then say, "Lord Jesus, if thou wilt, thou

thou canst make me clean ;” thou hast power to quicken and give eternal life to whom thou wilt ; thou art the Lord of heaven and earth ; all souls are in thy hands ; and nothing is too hard for thy right hand to bring to pass : say to my heart and eyes, Ephphatha be opened, and grant me a confidence towards thee, what thou art pleased to call trusting and believing in thee : increase my faith, and let me see the glory of God ; let thy Spirit cry in my heart, Abba Father !

There are many who will not believe that faith is now the same as formerly, or that thereby we can know the Lord, or be persuaded he loves us, or feel our sins forgiven : and, for my part, I do not know what such people pretend to believe more than the devils. Believe what they will beside, it brings no true happiness to the heart, and is no more than confessing, how good our Saviour was to the primitive Christians, what wonders he did in our father’s days, and how the saints found mercy, but now it is as if all was ceased ; and the God, whose name is the Unchangeable, is altered, and his faith no more of effect. How can such an one get forgiveness, when he does not believe it is to be gotten ? Or, how can he believe to salvation, who does not expect to be saved here, or be assured of going to heaven through faith, when he denies there is any such thing in the world ? He cannot have it ; he cannot enter into the rest, because of unbelief. Our Saviour’s word and promises are rejected by such an one, and God shall reject him, because he has not believed the only begotten Son of God. This was that sin which ruined so many in Israel in the time of Moses : they were destroyed of the destroyer ; they were slain with serpents ; there
perished,

perished, in one day, twenty-three thousand; and wherefore? Because they erred in their hearts and believed not, so God "swore in his wrath, they shall not enter into my rest." This hindered our Saviour to do many mighty works in Nazareth, because of their unbelief. And this was his resolution when he blessed his disciples and was taken up from them upon mount Olivet, "He that believeth and is baptized, shall be saved; but he that believes not, shall be damned," Mark xvi. 16. So, on the other hand, "all things are possible to him that believeth." "Only believe," says our Saviour, "and thou shalt see the glory of God." "Believe on me, and thou shalt see greater things than these." It is hence that our Saviour so often asked such as came to him, "Believest thou that I can do this?" And always tells such as he had healed or pardoned, "Thy faith hath saved thee; thy faith hath made thee whole: be it unto thee according to thy faith." And it is on this account that the apostles have spoken such excellent things of faith; how through it the fathers knew they were righteous, walked with God, had the testimony that they pleased him, wrought their righteousness, were blessed and justified, and had peace with God; and especially in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews, after the scripture had observed how all the prophets and noble champions of God, who saw afar off the promises and believed and died in faith, it is said, "Wherefore God was not ashamed to be called their God, but prepared for them a city." And in all St. Paul's epistles, but especially to the Romans, Galatians and Ephesians, he sets forth that we are justified and made righteous only by faith in Christ; that our faith, as Abraham's,

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is imputed to us for righteousness; and that it is not our good deeds, strict life, or observing the law, will make one just before God, but faith in the dying and crucified Lamb; and it is a manifest error, and dangerous, when people have supposed to get to heaven any other way; or, in opposition to the faith, assert, we must be justified and saved by our works. Of such people there are two sorts, some who make nothing of faith, but place all in the moral and obedient life of man; and these are a sort of polished Heathen, a refined company of Atheists, who can sooner venture upon their works than upon the blood of the Son of God, and who hope to get in by some other way than by him. No, they never shall; he has sworn, and will not repent: "To me shall every knee bow." And that God, whose dying and redemption they despise and make light of, shall esteem them thieves and robbers in the presence of all the angels, because they entered not in by the door Christ, but sought to climb up some other way. They may do what they will, and build as well as they please, and glory in their duties, their charity and moral life, it is all filthy rags, it shall fall, and great shall be the fall of it, because it is built upon sand.

But there is another sort of men, who have a notion of their doing part and Christ the rest; that is, they will be the foundation, and Christ shall be the top-stone; they the first, and he the last. They will take his righteousness, the piece of new cloth to mend their old raiment: these are such, who knowing they have not true peace of heart, nor any certainty that they shall be saved, imagine not that their fault is in their being unbelievers, but they think they must do a

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great deal, and so add and join together their works and faith, and so make up their righteousness, and so fly to St. James's epistle, and reason, Can faith save a man? "Is not our faith made perfect by works? Was not Abraham himself justified by works, and Rahab?" I answer, the faith St. James speaks of, all who are called Christians have, but it will not save them, it is a dead faith, such as devils have, who believe there is one God and tremble, but are not better for all their belief; so it is St. James sets at nought such a believing, and bids us to shew it by our works; and whenever I see men living sinful lives, and yet prating of faith, I would say, shew it by your fruits; and know that as yet you have neither part nor lot in the matter. Where true faith is, there is a holy life; there are indeed the fruits and good works which adorn the gospel of God our Saviour, and shew to the world that we are just and faithful men; and this is what St. James means when he says, Abraham was justified by works when he offered up his son Isaac upon the altar: that is, then he was justified in the sight of his whole house and in the sight of his servants, when he spared not his only child, but offered him up when God called him to do so. But who can forget how many years before this it was that Abraham believed God, and his faith was accounted to him for righteousness; even before Isaac was born or himself circumcised, and he received circumcision as a seal of the righteousness which he had by faith, being yet uncircumcised. But the true matter is this: before God nothing avails but Jesus Christ and faith in his blood; and whosoever believeth, his faith shall be reckoned to him for righteousness; and the obedience

and good works, and life and suffering of Jesus, with all his merits, are thereby ours, and we know it, and stand before God therein perfect and just; and this, and this only is our wedding-garment, our white robe, our clean linen: but before men, faith alone do not justify, for there our good works must shine, that they may see them, and glorify our Father which is in heaven. And, as I said before, it is nonsense to boast of faith when one is a slave of sin, a breaker of the law, a lover of the world, an unclean person, such know not what faith is; for faith purifies the heart; by faith we are saved from sin; we overcome the world by faith; and this faith is not of ourselves, it is the gift of God: it is not natural, it is from above, and is the greatest blessing a true Christian has in the world, for hereby he sees Jesus, has peace through the shedding of his blood, is persuaded of salvation, and feels and is confident he has eternal life; so that he can say, to the honour of our only Lord Jesus Christ, "I live, and yet not I, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me." And whereas another doubts if Jesus be the Lord, he believes in him: another doubts if Jesus loves him, he believes it and rejoices with joy unspeakable and full of glory: another doubts if faith alone justifies before God, he believes it, and is justified and saved already: another doubts and questions if one can know Jesus before death, he believes and knows him to be with him and in him, and his body is now his temple: another has scruples about his eternal state, he believes, I am washed, I am justified, I shall be with him forever,
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I am sealed to the day of redemption: whether I live I live to the Lord, or whether I die I die to the Lord; whether I live or die I am the Lord's. In short, as David and St. Paul say, "I have believed, and therefore have I spoken;" so a believer speaks because he believes and is not afraid. But others, who have not faith, whom John calls the fearful and unbelievers, are afraid to speak, and continue in doubt and fear; or, if they are not sincere, they scruple not to brand the true faith with all opprobrious names, and call it blasphemy, presumption, and all that is bad: but let such know, a time shall come when they shall rue such behaviour, and feel the want of the faith they have despised; for who can escape? who enters eternity, or leaves the world cheerfully, but he who believeth that Jesus is his Lord God and Saviour, and whose blood has washed away all his sins? You see then how necessary it is to try your own hearts, and examine yourselves, if you are in the faith: do this, then, in the presence of that Son of man, whose eyes are like a flame of fire, and let your hearts be lifted up to him till you can joyfully and without fear say, I believe thou art my Lord and my God; thou hast cast all my sins behind thy back; thou hast loved me and died for me: so shalt thou go thy way rejoicing, and live and die in faith, and be happy and blessed here and hereafter. Amen.

An H Y M N.

I.

HOW happy he, who firm depends
On Christ, nor doubting faints!
But earnest for that faith contends
Deliver'd to the saints:

II.

Whose faithful spirit feels within
His everlasting love;
Whom he believes, though now unseen,
Unless by those above.

III.

No more in darkness left to grope,
By faith enlighten'd now,
His heart enjoys the living hope,
And foretastes heav'n below.

IV.

His name he knows is now enroll'd
Among that chosen train
Who, highly favour'd, him behold,
Who once for them was slain.

V.

O Holy Ghost, whose office 'tis,
That faith to me impart;
That earnest of eternal bliss,
That witness in my heart.

VI.

Inspire me with that confidence
In Jesus and his death,
That cheerful I may go from hence
To th' Author of my faith.

FINIS.

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